

a slacktivist women's reader

**AWOL@Sub-Plot:**



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## **About the cover**

Anne Bonny was a pirate around 1725 A.D. She was brought up in a wealthy English family, but married a man who was socially beneath her (and a ostensibly bit of a cad). When her family disinherited her, he left. Anne took up with the notorious pirate Calico Jack Rackham.

Anne organised a "wife sale" to divorce herself from her first husband by "selling" herself to her new husband. This was a common practice among common folk, also known as "the proletarian practice of self-marriage and self-divorce". This is interesting because it removes marriage from the gaze of the law and the churches, but also links it strongly with the exchange or creation of 'goods' that can be sold. A wife sale is a public declaration of a marriage promise.

Anne dressed as a man, went to sea with Calico Jack as a pirate. Pirate ships were known to be floating, looting collectives. Captains were democratically elected (though how frequently is a bit unclear), and ships worked to a set of agreed principles. On board, Anne met up with Pirate Mary Read (pictured below) who had been a soldier before joining with the pirates.

They were eventually captured. At trial, Anne's shipmates described her as a courageous fighter and pirate. Pregnancy enabled her to escape execution. Pirate Mary Read eventually died in prison.

*Source: "Lascivious Bodies: A Sexual History of the Eighteenth Century" by Julie Peakman (2004)*

## **Attribution**

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We've tried to make it clear who is speaking within this reader, and whether they are part of the AWOL Collective or a published author. Anything that doesn't clearly state who the author is was written by someone from AWOL.

Because of limited time and computer resources, this reader was mostly collected and layed out by one person. The rest of AWOL might not agree with everything in it, but the idea was more to share resources and debate than to put a platform across.



# Sex, Race and Class

by Selma James

There has been enough confusion generated when sex, race and class have confronted each other as separate and even conflicting entities. That they are separate entities is self-evident. That they have proven themselves to be not separate, even inseparable, is harder to discern. Yet if sex and race are pulled away from class, virtually all that remains is the truncated, provincial, sectarian politics of the white male metropolitan Left. I hope to show in barest outline, first, that the working class movement is something other than what that Left has ever envisioned it to be, and second, that locked within the contradiction between the discrete entities of sex or race and the totality of class is the greatest deterrent to working class power and at the same time the creative energy to achieve that power.

In our pamphlet which Avis Brown so generously referred to,[1] we tackled "the relation of women to capital and the kind of struggle we can effectively wage to destroy it," and drew throughout on the experience of the struggle against capital by Black people. Beginning with the female (caste) experience, we redefined class to include women. That redefinition was based on the unwaged labour of the housewife. We put it this way:

*Since Marx, it has been clear that capital rules and develops through the wage, that is, that the foundation of capitalist society was the wage labourer and his or her direct exploitation. What has been neither clear nor assumed by the organizations of the working class movement is that precisely through the wage has the exploitation of the non-wage labourer been organized. This exploitation has been even more effective because the lack of a wage hid it... Where women are concerned their labour appears to be a personal service outside of capital.[2]*

But if the relation of caste to class where women are concerned presents itself in a hidden, mystified form, this mystification is not unique to women. Before we confront race, let us take an apparent diversion.

The least powerful in the society are our children, also unwaged in a wage labour society. They were once (and in tribal society for example still are) accepted as an integral part of the productive activity of the community. The work they did was part of the total social labour and was acknowledged as such. Where capital is extending or has extended its rule, children are taken away from others in the community and forced to go to schools, against which the number of rebels is growing daily. Is their powerlessness a class question? Is their struggle against school the class struggle? We believe it is. Schools are institutions organized by capital to achieve its purpose through and against the child.

Capital... sent them to school not only because they are in the way of others' more "productive" labour or only to indoctrinate them. The rule of capital through the wage compels every able bodied person to function, under the law of division of labour, and to function in ways that are if not immediately, then ultimately profitable to the expansion and extension of the rule of capital. That, fundamentally, is the meaning of school. Where children are concerned, their labour appears to be learning for their own benefit.[3]

So here are two sections of the working class whose activities, one in the home, the other in the school, appear to be outside of the capitalist wage labour relation because the workers themselves are wageless. In reality, their activities are facets of capitalist production and its division of labour.

The first, housewives, are involved in the production and (what is the same thing) reproduction of workers, what Marx calls labour power. They service those who are daily destroyed by working for wages and who need to be daily renewed; and they care for and discipline those who are being prepared to work when they grow up.

The other, children, are those who from birth are the objects of this care and discipline, who are trained in homes, in schools and in front of the T.V. to be future workers. But this has two aspects.

In the first place, for labour power to be reproduced in the form of children, these children must be coerced into accepting discipline and especially the discipline of working, of being exploited in order to be able to eat. In addition, however, they must be disciplined and trained to perform a certain kind of work. The labour that capital wants done is divided and each category parceled out internationally as the life work, the destiny, the identity of specific sets of workers. The phrase often used to describe this is the international division of labour. We will say more of this later, but for now let the West Indian mother of a seven-year-old sum up her son's education with precision: "They're choosing the street sweepers now."

Those of us in the feminist movement who have torn the final veil away from this international capitalist division of labour to expose women's and children's class position, which was hidden by the particularity of their caste position, learnt a good deal of this from the Black movement. It is not that it is written down anywhere (though we discovered later it was, in what would seem to some a strange place.) A mass movement teaches less by words than by the power it exercises which, clearing away the debris of appearances, tells it like it is.

Just as the women's movement being "for" women and the rebellion of children being "for" children, appears at first not to be about class, the Black movement in the US (and elsewhere) also began by adopting what appeared to be only a caste position in opposition to the racism of white male-dominated groups. Intellectuals in Harlem and Malcolm X, that great revolutionary, who were nationalists, both appeared to place colour above class when the white Left were still chanting variations of "Black and white unite and fight," or "Negroes and Labour must join together." The Black working class was able through this nationalism to redefine class: overwhelmingly, Black and Labour were synonymous (with no other group was Labour as synonymous, except perhaps with women). The demands of Blacks and the forms of struggle created by Blacks were the most comprehensive working class struggle.

It is not, then, that the Black movement "wandered off into the class struggle," as Avis says. It was the class struggle and this took a while to sink into our consciousness. Why?

One reason is because some of us wore the blinkers of the white male Left, whether we knew it or not. According to them, if the struggle's not in the factory, it's not the class struggle. The real bind was that this Left assured us they spoke in the name of Marxism. They threatened that if we broke from them, organizationally or politically, we were breaking with Marx and scientific socialism. What gave us the boldness to break, fearless of the consequences, was the power of the Black movement. We found that redefining class went hand-in-hand with rediscovering a Marx that Left would never understand.

There were deeper reasons too why caste and class seemed contradictory. It appears often that the interests of Blacks are contradicted by the interests of whites, and it is similar with men and women. To grasp the class interest when there seems not one but two, three, four, each contradicting the other, is one of the most difficult revolutionary tasks, in theory and practice, that confronts us.

Another source of confusion is that not all women, children or Black men are working class. This is only to say that within the movements are layers whose struggle tends to be aimed at moving up in the capitalist hierarchy rather than at destroying it. And so within each movement there is a struggle about which class interest the movement will serve. But this is the history also of white male workers' movements. There is no class "purity," not even in shop floor organizations. The struggle by workers against organizations they formed there and in the society generally, trade unions, Labour parties, etc., is the class struggle.[4]

Let's put the relation of caste to class another way. The word "culture" is often used to show that class concepts are narrow, philistine, inhuman. Exactly the opposite is the case. A national culture which has evolved over decades or centuries may appear to deny that society's relation to international capitalism. It is a subject too wide to go into deeply here but one basic point can be quickly clarified.

The life-style, unique to themselves, which a people develop once they are enmeshed by capitalism, in response to and in rebellion against it, cannot be understood at all except as the totality of their capitalist lives. To delimit culture is to reduce it to a decoration of daily life.[5] Culture is plays and poetry about the exploited; ceasing to wear mini-skirts and taking to trousers instead; the clash between the soul of Black Baptism and the guilt and sin of white Protestantism. Culture is also the shrill of the alarm clock that rings at 6a.m. when a Black woman in London wakes her children to get them ready for the baby minder. Culture is how cold she feels at the bus stop and then how hot in the crowded bus. Culture is how you feel on Monday morning at eight when you clock in, wishing it was Friday, wishing your life away. Culture is the speed of the line or the weight and smell of dirty hospital sheets, and you meanwhile thinking of what to make for tea that night. Culture is making the tea while your man watches the news on the T.V.

And culture is an "irrational woman" walking out of the kitchen into the sitting room and without a word turning off the T.V. "for no reason at all."

From where does this culture spring which is so different from a man's, if you are a woman, and different too from a white woman's if you are a Black woman? Is it auxiliary to the class struggle (as the white

Left would have it) or is it more fundamental to the class struggle (as Black nationalists and radical feminists would have it) because it is special to your sex, your race, your age, your nationality and the moment in time when you are these things?

Our identity, our social roles, the way we are seen, appears to be disconnected from our capitalist functions. To be liberated from them (or through them) appears to be indepen-



dent from our liberation from capitalist wage slavery. In my view, identity-caste is the very substance of class.

Here is the "strange place" where we found the key to the relation of class to caste written down most succinctly. Here is where the international division of labour is posed as power relationships within the working class. It is Volume I of Marx's Capital.

"Manufacture... develops a hierarchy of labour powers, to which there corresponds a scale of wages. If, on the one hand, the individual labourers are appropriated and annexed for life by a limited function; on the other hand, the various operations of the hierarchy are parcelled out among the labourers according to both their natural and their acquired capabilities." [6]

In two sentences is laid out the deep material connection between racism, sexism, national chauvinism and the chauvinism of the generations who are working for wages against children and old age pensioners who are wageless, who are dependents. A hierarchy of labour powers and scale of wages to correspond.

Racism and sexism train us to develop and acquire certain capabilities at the expense of all others. Then these acquired capabilities are taken to be our nature and fix our functions for life, and fix also the quality of our mutual relations. So planting cane or tea is not a job for white people and changing nappies is not a job for men and beating children is not violence. Race, sex, age, nation, each is an indispensable element of the international division of labour. Our feminism bases itself on a hitherto invisible stratum of the hierarchy of labour powers—the housewife—to which there corresponds no wage at all.

To proceed on the basis of a hierarchical structure among waged and unwaged slavery is not, as Avis accuses the working class of doing, "concentrating... exclusively on the economic determinants of the class struggle." The work you do and the wages you receive are not merely "economic" but social determinants, determinants of social power. It is not the working class but organizations which claim to be of and for that class which reduce the continual struggle for social power by that class into "economic determinants," such as greater capitalist control for a pittance more a week. Wage rises that unions negotiate often turn out to be standstills or even cuts, either through inflation or through more intense exploitation (often in the form of productivity deals) which more than pay the capitalist back for the rise. And so people assume that this was the intention of workers in demanding, for example, more wages, more money, more "universal social power," in the words of Marx.

The social power relations of the sexes, races, nations and generations are precisely, then, particularized forms of class relations. These power relations within the working class weaken us in the power struggle between the classes. They are the particularized forms of indirect rule, one section of the class colonizing another, and through this, capital imposing its own will on us all. One of the reasons why these so-called working class organizations have been so able to mediate the struggle is that we have, internationally, allowed them to isolate "the working class," which they identify as white, male and over 21, from the rest of us. The unskilled white male worker, an exploited human being who is increasingly disconnected from capital's perspective for him to work, to vote, to participate in its society, he also, racist and sexist though he is,

recognizes himself as the victim of these organizations. But housewives, Blacks, young people, workers from the Third World, excluded from the definition of class, have been told that their confrontation with the white male power structure in the metropolis is an "exotic historical accident." Divided by the capitalist organization of society into factory, office, school, plantation, home and street, we are divided too by the very institutions which claim to represent our struggle collectively as a class.

In the metropolis, the Black movement was the first section of the class massively to take its autonomy from these organizations, and to break away from the containment of the struggle only to the factory. When Black workers burn the centre of a city, however, white Left eyes, especially if they are trade union eyes, see race, not class.

The women's movement was the next major movement of the class in the metropolis to find for itself a power base outside the factory as well as in it. Like the Black movement before it, to be organizationally autonomous of capital and its institutions, women and their movement had also to be autonomous of that part of the "hierarchy of labour powers" which capital used specifically against them. For Blacks it was whites. For women it was men. For Black

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women it is both.

Strange to think that even today, when confronted with the autonomy of the Black movement or the autonomy of the women's movement, there are those who talk about this "dividing the working class." Strange indeed when our experience has told us that in order for the working class to unite in spite of the divisions which are inherent in its very structure- factory versus plantation versus home versus schools- those at the lowest levels of the hierarchy must themselves find the key to their weakness, must themselves find the strategy which will attack that point and shatter it, must themselves find their own modes of struggle.

The Black movement has not in our view "integrated into capitalism's plural society" (though many of its "leaders" have), it has not "been subsumed to white working class strategy." (Here I think Avis is confusing white working class struggle with trade union/Labour party strategy. They are mortal enemies, yet they are often taken as identical). The Black movement has in the United States, on the contrary, challenged and continues to challenge the most powerful capitalist state in the world. The most powerful at home and abroad. When it burnt down the centres of that metropolis and challenged all constituted authority, it made a way for the rest of the working class everywhere to move in its own specific interests. We women moved. This is neither an accident nor the first time events have moved in this sequence.

It is not an accident because when constituted power was confronted, a new possibility opened for all women. For example, the daughters of men to whom was delegated some of this power saw through the noble mask of education, medicine and the law for which their mothers had sacrificed their lives. Oh yes, marriage to a man with a good salary would be rewarded by a fine house to be imprisoned in, and even a Black servant; they would have privilege for as long as they were attached to that salary which was not their own. But power would remain in the hands of the white male power structure. They had to renounce the privilege even to strike out for power. Many did. On the tide of working class power which the Black movement had expressed in the streets, and all women expressed in the day-to-day rebellion in the home, the women's movement came into being.

It is not the first time either that a women's movement received its impetus from the exercise of power by Black people. The Black slave who formed the Abolitionist Movement and organized the Underground Railroad for the escape to the North also gave white women, and again the more privileged of them, a chance, an occasion to transcend the limitations in which the female personality was imprisoned. Women, trained always to do for others, left their homes not to free themselves- that would have been outrageous- but to free "the slave." They were encouraged by Black women, ex-slaves like Sojourner Truth, who suffered because, being women, they had been the breeders of labour power on the plantation. But once those white women had taken their first decisive step out of the feminine mould, they confronted more sharply their own situation. They had to defend their right, as women, to speak in public against slavery. They were refused, for example, seating at the Abolitionist conference of 1840 in London because they were women. By 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, they called their own conference, for women's rights. There was a male speaker. He was a leading Abolitionist. He had been a slave. His name was Frederick Douglass.

And when young white women headed South on the Freedom Ride buses in the early 60s of this century and discovered that their male (white and Black) comrades had a special place for them in the hierarchy of struggle, as capital had in the hierarchy of labour power, history repeated itself- almost. This time it was not for the vote but for a very different goal that they formed a movement. It was a movement for liberation.

The parallels that are drawn between the Black and women's movements can always turn into an 11-plus: who is more exploited? Our purpose here is not parallels. We are seeking to describe that complex interweaving of forces which is the working class; we are seeking to break down the power relations among us on which is based the hierarchical rule of international capital. For no man can represent us as women any more than whites can speak about and themselves end the Black experience. Nor do we seek to convince men of our feminism. Ultimately they will be "convinced" by our power. We offer them what we offer the most privileged women: power over their enemies. The price is an end to their privilege over us.

The strategy of feminist class struggle is, as we have said, based on the wageless woman in the home. Whether she also works for wages outside the home, her labour of producing and reproducing the working class weighs her down, weakens her capacity to struggle, she doesn't even have time. Her position

in the wage structure is low especially but not only if she is Black. And even if she is relatively well placed in the hierarchy of labour powers (rare enough!), she remains defined as a sexual object of men. Why? Because as long as most women are housewives part of whose function in reproducing labour power is to be the sexual object of men, no woman can escape that identity. We demand wages for the work we do in the home. And that demand for a wage from



the state is, first, a demand to be autonomous of men on whom we are now dependent. Secondly, we demand money without working out of the home, and open for the first time the possibility of refusing forced labour in the factories and in the home itself.

It is here in this strategy that the lines between the revolutionary Black and the revolutionary feminist movements begin to blur. This perspective is founded on the least powerful, the wageless. Reinforcing capital's international division of labour is a standing army of unemployed who can be shunted from industry to industry, from country to country. The Third World is the most massive repository of this industrial reserve army. (The second most massive is the kitchen in the metropolis.) Port of Spain, Calcutta, Algiers, the Mexican towns south of the US border are the labour power for shitwork in Paris, London, Frankfurt and the farms of California and Florida. What is their role in the revolution? How can the wageless struggle without the lever of the wage and the factory? We do not give the answers, we can't. But we pose the questions in a way which assumes that the unemployed have not to go to work in order to subvert capitalist society.

Housewives working without a pay packet in the home may also have a job outside of their homes. The subordination of the wage of the man in the home and the subordinating nature of that labour weaken the woman wherever else she is working, and regardless of race. Here is the basis for Black and white women to act together, "supported" or "unsupported," not because the antagonism of race is overcome, but because we both need the autonomy that the wage and the struggle for the wage can bring. Black women will know in what organizations (with Black men, with white women, with neither) to make that struggle. No one else can know.

We don't agree with Avis that "the Black American struggle failed to fulfill its potential as a revolutionary vanguard..." if by "vanguard" is meant the basic propellant of class struggle in a particular historical situation. It has used the "specificity of its experience" as a nation and as a class both at once to redefine class and the class struggle itself. Perhaps the theoreticians have not, but then they must never be confused with the movement. Only as a vanguard could that struggle have begun to clarify the central problem of our age, the organizational unity of the working class internationally as we now perceive and define it.

It is widely presumed that the Vanguard Party on the Leninist model embodies that organizational unity. Since the Leninist model assumes a vanguard expressing the total class interest, it bears no relation to the reality we have been describing, where no one section of the class can express the experience and interest of, and pursue the struggle for, any other section. The formal organizational expression of a general class strategy does not yet anywhere exist.

Let me refer finally to a letter written against one of the organizations of the Italian extra-parliamentary Left who, when we had a feminist symposium in Rome last year and excluded men, called us fascists and attacked us physically.

The traditional attack on the immigrant worker, especially but not exclusively if he or she is Black (or Southern Italian), is that her presence threatens the gains of the native working class. Exactly the same is said about women in relation to men. The anti-racist (i.e. anti-nationalist and anti-sexist) point of view, the point of view of struggle, is to discover the organizational weakness which permits the most powerful sections of the class to be divided from the less powerful, thereby allowing capital to play on this division, defeating us. The question is, in fact, one of the basic questions which the class faces today. Where Lenin divided the class between the advanced and the backward, a subjective division, we see the division along the lines of capitalist organization, the more powerful and the less powerful. It is the experience of the less powerful that when workers in a stronger position (that is, men with a wage in relation to women without one, or whites with a higher wage than Blacks) gain a "victory," it may not be a victory for the weaker and even may represent a defeat for both. For in the disparity of power within the class is precisely the strength of capital.

How the working class will ultimately unite organizationally, we don't know. We do know that up to now many of us have been told to forget our own needs in some wider interest which was never wide enough to include us. And so we have learnt by bitter experience that nothing unified and revolutionary will be formed until each section of the exploited will have made its own autonomous power felt.

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class.

#### NOTES :

[1] "The Colony of the Colonized: notes on Race, Class and Sex," Avis Brown, *Race Today*, June 1973. The writer refers to *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (Falling Wall Press, Bristol 1972), as "brilliant." The

third edition was published as a book in 1975. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from Power of Women, 1975. (We were later to learn that Avis Brown was a pseudonym for A. Sivanandan, a man who is now head of the Institute of Race Relations, London.) Sex, Race and Class, the reply to "Avis Brown," was first published in Race Today, January 1974.

[2] p.28

[3] p.28

[4] For an analysis of the antagonistic relationship between workers and trade unions see S. James, Women, The Unions and Work, or What is Not to be Done, first published in 1972, republished with a new Postscript, Falling Wall Press, Bristol, 1976.

[5] For the best demystification of culture I know which shows, for example, how West Indian cricket has carried in its heart racial and class conflicts, see C.L.R. James, Beyond a Boundary, Hutchinson, London 1963. 4. From a letter by Lotta Feminista and the International Feminist Collective, reprinted in L'Offensiva, Musolini, Turin, 1972 (pp. 18-19). I wrote the paragraph quoted here.

[6] Karl Marx. Capital. Volume I. Moscow, 1958: p. 349



## **Global Womens' Strike**

The Strike and its demands give a unique framework for grassroots women and girls to express our needs whatever our situation, race, nationality, age, income, occupation, dis/ability, sexual preference . . . in towns and cities but also in villages, where most of us live. We hope that whatever demands you highlight or add, you will list them ALL. The demands unite everyone taking part in the Strike, and to each local action they bring international power.

The anti-globalisation, anti-war movement, to which women are contributing so much hard work and energy, is just beginning to recognise that Invest in Caring not Killing is a perspective for winning.

That is why the central demand of the Strike is:

\* Payment for all caring work — in wages, pensions, land and other resources. What is more valuable than raising children and caring for others? Invest in life and welfare, not military budgets and prisons.

\* This establishes women's entitlement — though we do the basic work in every society, our contribution is uncounted. The other demands are about specific needs, showing the ways that this first basic demand would change the world.

\* There has never been so much wealth in the world and there have never been so many of us, starting with women and children, who have nothing. At this crucial moment, we women must make our voices heard and our collective power felt.

Demands:

\* Payment for all caring work - in wages, pensions, land & other resources. What is more valuable than raising children & caring for others? Invest in life & welfare, not military budgets or prisons

\* Pay equity for all, women & men, in the global market.

\* Food security for breastfeeding mothers, paid maternity leave and maternity breaks. Stop penalizing us for being women.

\* Don't pay 'Third World debt'. We owe nothing, they owe us.

\* Accessible clean water, healthcare, housing, transport, literacy.

\* Non-polluting energy & technology which shortens the hours we work. We all need cookers, fridges, washing machines, computers, & time off!

\* Protection & asylum from all violence & persecution, including by family members & people in positions of authority.

\* Freedom of movement. Capital travels freely, why not people?

Why go on strike?

Women do the work of giving birth to, feeding and caring for the whole world. Those in whom we have invested our lives are slaughtered as 'collateral damage' or turned into killing machines. And so we have been central to every anti-war movement. It is a disaster that only half the human race is trained to care and the other half told it has 'more important things to do'.

As corporate power and its wars threaten every corner of all our lives, people every-



where have formed massive movements – to reclaim our land and our planet, and to stop the theft (via privatisation) of water, seeds, genes . . . The Global Women's Strike, women's independent voice in this great movement, reclaims military spending for caring, feeding, healing, learning.

Strike for:

\* A world which values all women's work and all women's lives.

Strike against:

\* "America's new war" and all wars - women & children are most of those killed & wounded, and 80% of refugees.

\* Globalisation - an end to no pay, low pay and too much work.

Can anyone deny that production should be at the service of caring, not killing and profit? Yet \$800+ billion is spent on arms each year – and more money has been committed to bombing countries like Afghanistan where people are starving, and persecuting or imprisoning anyone anywhere who dares to oppose.

A strike is the strongest weapon that workers have, and women, who do 2/3 of the world's work, are the hardest workers. When we stop, everything is disrupted.

Women and girls in over 60 countries made the first two Strikes a success by taking at least some time off from their work, waged as well as unwaged.

Of the world's 100 largest economic entities, 51 are corporations and 49 are countries.

People everywhere see that governments are promoting corporate greed against us while lining their own pockets. They impose structural adjustment programmes and cuts in services and welfare benefits, impoverishing us and imposing killing overwork.

The gap between women's wages and men's is 25%-50% and growing, lowering our pensions and our social power at every age.

Together the Strike and its demands give a unique framework for grassroots women and girls to express our needs whatever our situation, race, nationality, age, income, occupation, dis/ability, sexual preference . . . in towns and cities but also in villages, where most of us live.

The demands unite everyone taking part in the Strike, and to each local action they bring international power.



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**For too long anarchist feminists have been labeled as the ladies auxiliary of male bomb throwers.**

- Flick Ruby, "ANARCHA-FEMINISM"

(<http://www.spunk.org/library/anarcfem/sp001066.txt>)

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## **Teen Angst Graffiti**

### **Questioning our culture**

This graffiti was found in a small alley in Redfern-Everleigh-Darlington, some good creative vibes (presumably from local kids or some peter-pan-and-wendy uni students who'll never grow up). "Fuck the Cool Kids" - beauty, socialisation, appraisal and rejection of a constraining culture.

We live in our culture and are affected by it at such a deep level. When we question aspects of it, what are we really questioning. How can those questions become more meaningful. How can our questioning transcend guilt, shame, blame and become positive? How can we become agents in our own lives (write our own scripts) instead of 'acting out' roles already defined for us by a culture that will just absorb our defiance?



# Unroots for a talking forum

By Meela

## 1. There is a topic.

The topic might be decided in advance (for advertising), or democratically on the day.

Everyone should reference the topic in some way.

The topic isn't an advertising ploy that is forgotten about as soon as the discussion starts.

## 2. There is a moderator to facilitate discussion.

The moderator can take reasonable action to facilitate discussion such as timing comments, speaking lists, and requesting that some people refrain for a period.

If the moderator is always the same person, there will be a natural bias develop. Mix it up. Gain skills, have fun.

## 3. No minutes are taken.

If someone wants to write notes they are welcome to, but it is not done as a matter of course.

The point of conversation is the process of learning and discovery, not the enshrinement of our special product.

Making more work for someone (the minute-taker) creates a hierarchy of exploitation.

## 4. Anyone who calls for "less talk more action" is an agent provocateur and should be asked to leave.

Action grows from theory, theory grows from honest analysis of the world.

"More action" traps us in a cycle of powerlessness and ritual energy that we are too engaed to appraise and understand.

PROSECUTE  
THIS

## 5. Rules mean nothing if they're not agreed to willingly.

Rules should be flexible.

Rules should be reasonable.

Rules should have purpose.

## Comments :

Why would I write something like this? Well just being totally sick of going to 'collective' meetings where dominance is the name of the game. Or where no-one bothers to learn about facilitation so that discussion gets bogged down. Or people playing out their own fantasies of greatness through political rambling or overcommitment. Then there are the truly cool political discussions that are long-lasting and enjoyable until its time to delegate someone to type detailed minutes from 4 hours of debate (or 'make it into a pamphlet' for O-Week). Ha! Talk about equality.



So I have a lingering sense of 'not achieving' at meetings. Either not achieving results, or not enjoying the process of meeting, deciding and being with people. I think that refusing to think about the processes we go through means we really fail to challenge our most basic assumptions about society. From thence its an easy step to thinking about how easy it is for hierarchy, dominance and privilege to go totally unchallenged in a group setting. So many women say they feel uncomfortable in meetings, but how do we begin to challege and change that? Only by redefining the whole structure of meetings.



**But maybe boredom is erotic, when women do it, for men.**  
**- Margaret Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" (1985)**

# The Tyrany of Structurelessness

By Jo Freeman

(Excerpts)

During the years in which the women's liberation movement has been taking shape, a great emphasis has been placed on what are called leaderless, structureless groups as the main — if not sole — organizational form of the movement. The source of this idea was a natural reaction against the over-structured society in which most of us found ourselves, and the inevitable control this gave others over our lives, and the continual elitism of the Left and similar groups among those who were supposedly fighting this overstructuredness.

The idea of "structurelessness," however, has moved from a healthy counter to those tendencies to becoming a goddess in its own right. The idea is as little examined as the term is much used, but it has become an intrinsic and unquestioned part of women's liberation ideology. For the early development of the movement this did not much matter. It early defined its main goal, and its main method, as consciousness-raising, and the "structureless" rap group was an excellent means to this end. The looseness and informality of it encouraged participation in discussion, and its often supportive atmosphere elicited personal insight. If nothing more concrete than personal insight ever resulted from these groups, that did not much matter, because their purpose did not really extend beyond this.

The basic problems didn't appear until individual rap groups exhausted the virtues of consciousness-raising and decided they wanted to do something more specific. At this point they usually founderered because most groups were unwilling to change their structure when they changed their tasks. Women had thoroughly accepted the idea of "structurelessness" without realizing the limitations of its uses. People would try to use the "structureless" group and the informal conference for purposes for which they were unsuitable out of a blind belief that no other means could possibly be anything but oppressive. If the movement is to grow beyond these elementary stages of development, it will have to disabuse itself of some of its prejudices about organization and structure. There is nothing inherently bad about either of these. They can be and often are misused, but to reject them out of hand because they are misused is to deny ourselves the necessary tools to further development. We need to understand why "structurelessness" does not work.

## FORMAL AND INFORMAL STRUCTURES

Contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a structureless group. Any group of people of whatever nature that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will inevitably structure itself in some fashion. The structure may be flexible; it may vary over time; it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed regardless of the abilities, personalities, or intentions of the people involved. The very fact that we are individuals, with different talents, predispositions, and backgrounds makes this inevitable. Only if we refused to relate or interact on any basis whatsoever could we approximate structurelessness — and that is not the nature of a human group. This means that to strive for a structureless group is as useful, and as deceptive, as to aim at an "objective" news story, "value-free" social science, or a "free" economy. A "laissez faire" group is about as realistic as a "laissez faire" society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others. This hegemony can be so easily established because the idea of "structurelessness" does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones. Similarly "laissez faire" philosophy did not prevent the economically powerful from establishing control over wages, prices, and distribution of goods; it only prevented the government from doing so. Thus structurelessness becomes a way of masking power, and within the women's movement is usually most strongly advocated by those who are the most powerful (whether they are conscious of their power or not). As long as the structure of the group is informal, the rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is limited to those who know the rules. Those who do not know the rules and are not chosen for initiation must remain in confusion, or suffer from paranoid delusions that something is happening of which they are not quite aware.

For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be

open and available to everyone, and this can happen only if they are formalized. This is not to say that formalization of a structure of a group will destroy the informal structure. It usually doesn't. But it does hinder the informal structure from having predominant control and make available some means of attacking it if the people involved are not at least responsible to the needs of the group at large. "Structurelessness" is organizationally impossible. We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group, only whether or not to have a formally structured one. Therefore the word will not be used any longer except to refer to the idea it represents. Unstructured will refer to those groups which have not been deliberately structured in a particular manner. Structured will refer to those which have. A Structured group always has formal structure, and may also have an informal, or covert, structure. It is this informal structure, particularly in Unstructured groups, which forms the basis for elites.

## THE NATURE OF ELITISM

"Elitist" is probably the most abused word in the women's liberation movement. It is used as frequently, and for the same reasons, as "pinko" was used in the fifties. It is rarely used correctly. Within the movement it commonly refers to individuals, though the personal characteristics and activities of those to whom it is directed may differ widely: An individual, as an individual can never be an elitist, because the only proper application of the term "elite" is to groups. Any individual, regardless of how well-known that person may be, can never be an elite.

Correctly, an elite refers to a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent. A person becomes an elitist by being part of, or advocating the rule by, such a small group, whether or not that individual is well known or not known at all. Notoriety is not a definition of an elitist. The most insidious elites are usually run by people not known to the larger public at all. Intelligent elitists are usually smart enough not to allow themselves to become well known; when they become known, they are watched, and the mask over their power is no longer firmly lodged.

Elites are not conspiracies. Very seldom does a small group of people get together and deliberately try to take over a larger group for its own ends. Elites are nothing more, and nothing less, than groups of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities. They would probably maintain their friendship whether or not they were involved in political activities; they would probably be involved in political activities whether or not they maintained their friendships. It is the coincidence of these two phenomena which creates elites in any group and makes them so difficult to break.

These friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group. If no channels are set up, they function as the only networks of communication. Because people are friends, because they usually share the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don't. And it is a rare group that does not establish some informal networks of communication through the friends that are made in it.

Some groups, depending on their size, may have more than one such informal communications network. Networks may even overlap. When only one such network exists, it is the elite of an otherwise Unstructured group, whether the participants in it want to be elitists or not. If it is the only such network in a Structured group it may or may not be an elite depending on its composition and the nature of the formal Structure. If there are two or more such networks of friends, they may compete for power within the group, thus forming factions, or one may deliberately opt out of the competition, leaving the other as the elite. In a Structured group, two or more such friendship networks usually compete with each other for formal power. This is often the healthiest situation, as the other members are in a position to arbitrate between the two competitors for power and thus to make demands on those to whom they give their temporary allegiance. The inevitably elitist and exclusive nature of informal communication networks of friends is neither a new phenomenon characteristic of the women's movement nor a phenomenon new to women. Such informal relationships have excluded women for centuries from participating in integrated groups of which they were a part. In any profession or organization these networks have created the "locker room" mentality and the "old school" ties which have effectively prevented women as a group (as well as some men individually) from having equal access to the sources of power or social reward.

Much of the energy of past women's movements has been directed to having the structures of decision-making and the selection processes formalized so that the exclusion of women could be confronted directly. As we well know, these efforts have not prevented the informal male-only net-



works from discriminating against women, but they have made it more difficult.

Because elites are informal does not mean they are invisible. At any small group meeting anyone with a sharp eye and an acute ear can tell who is influencing whom. The members of a friendship group will relate more to each other than to other people. They listen more attentively, and interrupt less; they repeat each other's points and give in amiably; they tend to ignore or grapple with the "outs" whose approval is not necessary for making a decision. But it is necessary for the "outs" to stay on good terms with the "ins." Of course the lines are not as sharp as I have drawn them. They are nuances of interaction, not prewritten scripts. But they are discernible, and they do have their effect. Once one knows with whom it is important to check before a decision is made, and whose approval is the stamp of acceptance, one knows who is running things. Since movement groups have made no concrete decisions about who shall exercise power within them, many different criteria are used around the country. Most criteria are along the lines of traditional female characteristics. For instance, in the early days of the movement, marriage was usually a prerequisite for participation in the informal elite. As women have been traditionally taught, married women relate primarily to each other, and look upon single women as too threatening to have as close friends. In many cities, this criterion was further refined to include only those women married to New Left men. This standard had more than tradition behind it, however, because New Left men often had access to resources needed by the movement — such as mailing lists, printing presses, contacts, and information — and women were used to getting what they needed through men rather than independently. As the movement has charged through time, marriage has become a less universal criterion for effective participation, but all informal elites establish standards by which only women who possess certain material or personal characteristics may join. They frequently include: middle-class background (despite all the rhetoric about relating to the working class); being married; not being married but living with someone; being or pretending to be a lesbian; being between the ages of twenty and thirty; being college educated or at least having some college background; being "hip"; not being too "hip"; holding a certain political line or identification as a "radical"; having children or at least liking them; not having children; having certain "feminine" personality characteristics such as being "nice"; dressing right (whether in the traditional style or the antifeminist style); etc. There are also some characteristics which will almost always tag one as a "deviant" who should not be related to. They include: being too old; working full time, particularly if one is actively committed to a "career"; not being "nice"; and being avowedly single (i.e., neither actively heterosexual nor homosexual).

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This has two potentially negative consequences of which we should be aware. The first is that the informal structure of decision-making will be much like a sorority — one in which people listen to others because they like them and not because they say significant things. As long as the movement does not do significant things this does not much matter. But if its development is not to be arrested at this preliminary stage, it will have to alter this trend. The second is that informal structures have no obligation to be responsible to the group at large. Their power was not given to them; it cannot be taken away. Their influence is not based on what they do for the group; therefore they cannot be directly influenced by the group. This does not necessarily make informal structures irresponsible. Those who are concerned with maintaining their influence will usually try to be responsible. The group simply cannot compel such responsibility; it is dependent on the interests of the elite.

### **THE "STAR" SYSTEM**

The idea of "structurelessness" has created the "star" system. We live in a society which expects political groups to make decisions and to select people to articulate those decisions to the public at large. The press and the public do not know how to listen seriously to individual women as women; they want to know how the group feels. Only three techniques have ever been developed for establishing mass group opinion: the vote or referendum, the public opinion survey questionnaire, and the selection of group spokespeople at an appropriate meeting. The women's liberation movement has used none of these to communicate with the public. Neither the movement as a whole nor most of the multitudinous groups within it have established a

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***Don't be afraid of power. Women need to claim power at work, in politics, in the community. Don't be deterred by people saying you are selfish or asking for special privileges. It's not true.***

***- Joan Kirner and Moira Rayner, "The Woman's Power Pocket Book"***

means of explaining their position on various issues. But the public is conditioned to look for spokespeople. While it has consciously not chosen spokespeople, the movement has thrown up many women who have caught the public eye for varying reasons. These women represent no particular group or established opinion; they know this and usually say so. But because there are no official spokespeople nor any decision-making body that the press can query when it wants to know the movement's position on a subject, these women are perceived as the spokespeople. Thus, whether they want to or not, whether the movement likes it or not, women of public note are put in the role of spokespeople by default. This is one main source of the ire that is often felt toward the women who are labeled "stars." Because they were not selected by the women in the movement to represent the movement's views, they are resented when the press presumes that they speak for the movement. But as long as the movement does not select its own spokeswomen, such women will be placed in that role by the press and the public, regardless of their own desires.

This has several negative consequences for both the movement and the women labeled "stars." First, because the movement didn't put them in the role of spokesperson, the movement cannot remove them. The press put them there and only the press can choose not to listen. The press will continue to look to "stars" as spokeswomen as long as it has no official alternatives to go to for authoritative statements from the movement. The movement has no control in the selection of its representatives to the public as long as it believes that it should have no representatives at all. Second, women put in this position often find themselves viciously attacked by their sisters. This achieves nothing for the movement and is painfully destructive to the individuals involved. Such attacks only result in either the woman leaving the movement entirely—often bitterly alienated—or in her ceasing to feel responsible to her "sisters." She may maintain some loyalty to the movement, vaguely defined, but she is no longer susceptible to pressures from other women in it. One cannot feel responsible to people who have been the source of such pain without being a masochist, and these women are usually too strong to bow to that kind of personal pressure. Thus the backlash to the "star" system in effect encourages the very kind of individualistic nonresponsibility that the movement condemns. By purging a sister as a "star," the movement loses whatever control it may have had over the person who then becomes free to commit all of the individualistic sins of which she has been accused.

## POLITICAL IMPOTENCE

Unstructured groups may be very effective in getting women to talk about their lives; they aren't very good for getting things done. It is when people get tired of "just talking" and want to do something more that the groups flounder, unless they change the nature of their operation. Occasionally, the developed informal structure of the group coincides with an available need that the group can fill in such a way as to give the appearance that an unstructured group "works." That is, the group has fortuitously developed precisely the kind of structure best suited for engaging in a particular project.

While working in this kind of group is a very heady experience, it is also rare and very hard to replicate. There are almost inevitably four conditions found in such a group:

1) It is task oriented. Its function is very narrow and very specific, like putting on a conference or putting out a newspaper. It is the task that basically structures the group. The task determines what needs to be done and when it needs to be done. It provides a guide by which people can judge their actions and make plans for future activity.

2) It is relatively small and homogeneous. Homogeneity is necessary to insure that participants have a "common language" for interaction. People from widely different backgrounds may provide richness to a consciousness-raising group where each can learn from the others' experience, but too great a diversity among members of a task-oriented group means only that they continually misunderstand each other. Such diverse people interpret words and actions differently. They have different expectations about each other's behavior and judge the results according to different criteria. If everyone knows everyone else well enough to understand the nuances, these can be accommodated. Usually, they only lead to confusion and endless hours spent straightening out conflicts no one ever thought would arise.

3) There is a high degree of communication. Information must be passed on to everyone, opinions checked, work divided up, and participation assured in the relevant decisions. This is only possible if the group is small and people practically live together for the most crucial phases of the task.

Needless to say, the number of interactions necessary to involve everybody increases geometrically with the number of participants. This inevitably limits group participants to about five, or excludes some from some of the decisions. Successful groups can be as large as 10 or 15, but only when they are in fact composed of several smaller subgroups which perform specific



parts of the task, and whose members overlap with each other so that knowledge of what the different subgroups are doing can be passed around easily.

4) There is a low degree of skill specialization. Not everyone has to be able to do everything, but everything must be able to be done by more than one person. Thus no one is indispensable. To a certain extent, people become interchangeable parts.

While these conditions can occur serendipitously in small groups, this is not possible in large ones. Consequently, because the larger movement in most cities is as unstructured as individual rap groups, it is not too much more effective than the separate groups at specific tasks. The informal structure is rarely together enough or in touch enough with the people to be able to operate effectively. So the movement generates much motion and few results. Unfortunately, the consequences of all this motion are not as innocuous as the results' and their victim is the movement itself.

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The end of consciousness-raising leaves people with no place to go, and the lack of structure leaves them with no way of getting there. The women in the movement either turn in on themselves and their sisters or seek other alternatives of action. There are few that are available. Some women just "do their own thing." This can lead to a great deal of individual creativity, much of which is useful for the movement, but it is not a viable alternative for most women and certainly does not foster a spirit of cooperative group effort. Other women drift out of the movement entirely because they don't want to develop an individual project and they have found no way of discovering, joining, or starting group projects that interest them.

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The informal groups' vested interests will be sustained by the informal structures which exist, and the movement will have no way of determining who shall exercise power within it. If the movement continues deliberately to not select who shall exercise power, it does not thereby abolish power. All it does is abdicate the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it. If the movement continues to keep power as diffuse as possible because it knows it cannot demand responsibility from those who have it, it does prevent any group or person from totally dominating. But it simultaneously insures that the movement is as ineffective as possible. Some middle ground between domination and ineffectiveness can and must be found.

### **PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURING**

Once the movement no longer clings tenaciously to the ideology of "structurelessness," it is free to develop those forms of organization best suited to its healthy functioning. This does not mean that we should go to the other extreme and blindly imitate the traditional forms of organization. But neither should we blindly reject them all. Some of the traditional techniques will prove useful, albeit not perfect; some will give us insights into what we should and should not do to obtain certain ends with minimal costs to the individuals in the movement. Mostly, we will have to experiment with different kinds of structuring and develop a variety of techniques to use for different situations. The Lot System is one such idea which has emerged from the movement. It is not applicable to all situations, but is useful in some. Other ideas for structuring are needed. But before we can proceed to experiment intelligently, we must accept the idea that there is nothing inherently bad about structure itself — only its excess use.

While engaging in this trial-and-error process, there are some principles we can keep in mind that are essential to democratic structuring and are also politically effective:

1) Delegation of specific authority to specific individuals for specific tasks by democratic procedures. Letting people assume jobs or tasks only by default means they are not dependably done. If people are selected to do a task, preferably after expressing an interest or willingness to do it, they have made a commitment which cannot so easily be ignored.

2) Requiring all those to whom authority has been delegated to be responsible to those who selected them. This is how the group has control over people in positions of authority. Individuals may exercise power,

but it is the group that has ultimate say over how the power is exercised.

3) Distribution of authority among as many people as is reasonably possible. This prevents monopoly of power and requires those in positions of authority to consult with many others in the process of exercising it. It also gives many people the opportunity to have responsibility for specific tasks and thereby to learn different skills.

4) Rotation of tasks among individuals. Responsibilities which are held too long by one person, formally or informally, come to be seen as that person's "property" and are not easily relinquished or controlled by the group. Conversely, if tasks are rotated too frequently the individual does not have time to learn her job well and acquire the sense of satisfaction of doing a good job.

5) Allocation of tasks along rational criteria. Selecting someone for a position because they are liked by the group or giving them hard work because they are disliked serves neither the group nor the person in the long run. Ability, interest, and responsibility have got to be the major concerns in such selection. People should be given an opportunity to learn skills they do not have, but this is best done through some sort of "apprenticeship" program rather than the "sink or swim" method. Having a responsibility one can't handle well is demoralizing. Conversely, being blacklisted from doing what one can do well does not encourage one to develop one's skills. Women have been punished for being competent throughout most of human history; the movement does not need to repeat this process.

6) Diffusion of information to everyone as frequently as possible. Information is power. Access to information enhances one's power. When an informal network spreads new ideas and information among themselves outside the group, they are already engaged in the process of forming an opinion — without the group participating. The more one knows about how things work and what is happening, the more politically effective one can be.

7) Equal access to resources needed by the group. This is not always perfectly possible, but should be striven for. A member who maintains a monopoly over a needed resource (like a printing press owned by a husband, or a darkroom) can unduly influence the use of that resource. Skills and information are also resources. Members' skills can be equitably available only when members are willing to teach what they know to others.

When these principles are applied, they insure that whatever structures are developed by different movement groups will be controlled by and responsible to the group. The group of people in positions of authority will be diffuse, flexible, open, and temporary. They will not be in such an easy position to institutionalize their power because ultimate decisions will be made by the group at large. The group will have the power to determine who shall exercise authority within it.



## Mass

*A rant by Meela*

A friend of mine likes to characterise Lenin as a pirate sporting a parrot on one shoulder. "Build the revolutionary party! Arrk!" Trotsky The Parrot squawks. But how many of us actually take a step back from this false ideology of mass?

It's almost self-explainatory when you think about how a violent overthrow of the state and social order should be achieved: first you get the guns, then you get the power, then you get the women (or in lenist-speak: first you get the marxist theory, then you get the mass party, then you get to be Lenin). It's so obvious, that I'd never thought about it being wrong before today.

What point is there in mass? A mass objectifies its participants, it makes them into faceless "things" - spectators of their own lives. A mass is defined by its number of participants. If it becomes massive enough, it develops a gravity of its own - like the Communist Party of Australia did for a while (people knew it was fucked, but it was the best way for them to struggle). The real problem of a mass isn't that its large and globular, but that it nurtures hierarchy. Mass makes hierarchy necessary to shape and control itself, to present a front to the outside world (and create that gravitational effect that draws in other participants). Those on top of the hierarchy become disconnected from (while speaking for) those in the mass. They're visible and responsible. In taking responsibility, they take agency away from those in the mass. The mass might grow, but as less is required from those in the mass (directed from on high) it grows sluggish and unresponsive. Those in the mass expect those leading it to protect them because they've given their agency and ownership over to be controlled.



How can an organisation like this claim to be revolutionary? It can't challenge society

because it apes society in its very structure.

The revolution will happen only when a large number of people truly feel able to own their own lives, and their own actions and decide to use their actions to create a better world for all. It sounds like idealism, but its not. Everyone must truly feel a part (or that they are open to become a part) of the lives of others in a more meaningful way than is now possible. And they've got to know (that is, come to their own understanding of) how its gotta be achieved. Otherwise they're just a mass, disconnected from their 'leaders', and prone to be sold out on the first wave of treachery.

I don't think that building this kind of universal working-class consciousness is going to be possible by turning up to rallies, forcing pamphlets out of every orifice, and shouting at people.



## **Let's go AWOL!**

Anti-capitalist

Autonomous

Anti-authoritarian

WOMENS

Liberationists

Priorities which shape an AWOL perspective:

Opposining Sexual Violence

\* Our direct / indirect experience of it

\* strategies for dealing with it as it arises in everyday life in our "sub-cultures"

\* sexual violence as all-pervasive "culture", permeating all dominant sexual imagery and our own sexual conditioning

Reproductive freedom

\* Abortion and the current reactionary offensive

\* reproductive autonomy in general: the right to knowledge and control over our own bodies; the deliberate lack of access to information about contraception, sexuality, motherhood and relationship choices, and menstruation, especially for young and not-so-young women

Unpaid Labour

\* Broad understanding that womens' labour in the home (and beyond) is central to the functioning of the capitalist system participation and support for the Global Womens' Strike, which takes place on IWD and highlights the need to divert funding from military spending, over to paying for 'caring work', largely unpaid (or grossly underpaid) – came out of the Wages for Housework Campaign, has taken off in many places around the world, including Venezuela.

Outworkers and fashion fascism

\* Women are exploited at both ends of the production equation within the "fashion" industries: as producers of garments, and as consumers bullied into spending big on clothes made by sweated labour

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***Stella watched her 'double' moving in the light, and she did not recognize her. She almost hated her. Her first reaction was one of revolt, of rejection. This image was not she. She repudiated it. It was a work of artifice, of lighting, of stage setting.***

- *Anais Nin, "Stella" (1945)*

## **AWOL@Sub-Plot: A slacktivist womens' reader**

- \* narrow, manipulative, and inherently violent notions of beauty imposed on us at every turn (ties in with the sexual violence angle)
- \* Shedding the layers of conditioning which represses our Autonomy
- \* The dead weight of our rigorous training to repress our Autonomy: and into our sexual roles as: sex object (or aspiring sex object), obedient worker, dutiful housewife and childbearer/childrearer, discipliner of the "next wave of labour" (i.e. Children), and all-round dispenser of emotional support and affection to males the world over – forever projecting permanent sexual availability, and existing in a prison/factory of domesticity.
- \* The role of the church, family and spectacle (perpetrated by the media) in cementing this
- \* strategies for reversing this process
  - emotional element of autonomy
  - excercising our capacity to live out other, more preferable roles

### **Queerness and Sexual Autonomy**

- \* Naming our sexuality for ourselves
- \* living out a sexuality that is autonomous, that is, not necessarily revolving around or even wanting men in the picture
- \* living out a sexuality that is entirely at odds with the socially-restricted role cut out for us by capitalist patriarchy (as outlined above)

Lastly, an AWOL perspective is relevant to ALL other forms and areas of organising, and/or creation of social spaces.



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### **CYBERFEMINIST MANIFESTO FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

*We are the modern cunt  
positive anti reason  
unbounded unleashed unforgiving  
we see art with our cunt we make art with our cunt  
we believe in jouissance madness holiness and poetry  
we are the virus of the new world disorder  
rupturing the symbolic from within  
saboteurs of big daddy mainframe  
the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix  
VNS MATRIXterminators of the moral codes  
mercenaries of slime  
go down on the altar of abjection  
probing the visceral temple we speak in tongues  
infiltrating disrupting disseminating  
corrupting the discourse  
we are the future cunt*

*- Manifesto first declared by VNS Matrix (1991),  
Adelaide & Sydney, Australia*



# **Women and the Spectacle**

*aka "Situationism and Anarchist Feminism" By Carol Ehrlich*

To transform the world and to change the structure of life are one and the same thing.[1]

The personal is the political.[2]

Anarchists are used to hearing that they lack a theory that would help in building a new society. At best, their detractors say patronizingly, anarchism tells us what not to do. Don't permit bureaucracy or hierarchical authority; don't let a vanguard party make decisions; don't tread on me. Don't tread on anyone. According to this perspective, anarchism is not a theory at all. It is a set of cautionary practices, the voices of libertarian conscience - always idealistic, sometimes a bit truculent, occasionally anachronistic, but a necessary reminder.

There is more than a kernel of truth to this objection. Just the same, there are varieties of anarchist thought that can provide a theoretical framework for analysis of the world and action to change it. For radical feminists who want to take that "step in self-conscious theoretical development",[3] perhaps the greatest potential lies in Situationism.

The value of Situationism for an anarchist feminist analysis is that it combines a socialist awareness of the primacy of capitalist oppression with an anarchist emphasis upon transforming the whole of public and private life. The point about capitalist oppression is important: All too often anarchists seem to be unaware that this economic system exploits most people. But all too often socialist - especially Marxists - are blind to the fact that people are oppressed in every aspect of life: work, what passes for leisure, culture, personal relationships - all of it. And only anarchists insist that people must transform the conditions of their lives themselves - it cannot be done for them. Not by the party, not by the union, not by "organizers", not by anyone else.

Two basic Situationist concepts are "commodity" and "spectacle". Capitalism has made all of social relations commodity relations: The market rules all. People are not only producers and consumers in the narrow economic sense, but the very structure of their daily lives is based on commodity relations. Society "is consumed as a whole - the ensemble of social relationships and structures is the central product of the commodity economy".[4] This has inevitably alienated people from their lives, not just from their labor; to consume social relationships makes one a passive spectator in one's life. The spectacle, then, is the culture that springs from the commodity economy - the stage is set, the action unfolds, we applaud when we think we are happy, we yawn when we think we are bored, but we cannot leave the show, because there is no world outside the theater for us to go to.

In recent times, however, the societal stage has begun to crumble, and so the possibility exists of constructing another world outside the theater - this time, a real world, one in which each of us directly participates as subject, not as object. The situationist phrase for this possibility is "the reinvention of everyday life".

How is daily life to be reinvested? By creating situations that disrupt what seems to be the natural order of things - situations that jolt people out of customary ways of thinking and behaving. Only then will they be able to act, to destroy the manufactured spectacle and the commodity economy - that is, capitalism in all its forms. Only then will they be able to create free and un-alienated lives.

The congruence of this activist, social anarchist theory with radical feminist theory is striking. The concepts of commodity and spectacle are especially applicable to the lives of women. In fact, many radical feminists have described these in detail, without placing them in the Situationist framework.[5] To do so broadens the analysis, by showing women's situation as an organic part of the society as a whole, but at the same time without playing socialist reductionist games. Women's oppression is part of the over-all oppression of people by a capitalist economy, but it is not less than the oppression of others. Nor - from a Situationist

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***My hands are shaking. Why am I frightened? I've crossed no boundaries, I've given no trust, taken no risk, all is safe. Its the choice that terrifies me.***

***- Margaret Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" (1985)***

## **AWOL@Sub-Plot: A slacktivist womens' reader**

phrenia". Tax constructs an inner monologue for the housewife-as-commodity: "I am nothing when I am by myself. In myself, I am nothing. I only know that I exist because I am needed by someone who is real, my husband, and by my children".[7]

When feminists describe socialisation into the female sex role, when they point out the traits female children are taught (emotional dependence, childishness, timidity, concern with being beautiful, docility, passivity, and so on), they are talking about the careful production of a commodity - although it isn't usually called that. When they describe the oppressiveness of sexual objectification, or of living in the nuclear family, or of being a Supermother, or of working in the kinds of low-level, underpaid jobs that most women find in the paid labour force, they are also describing woman as commodity. Women are consumed by men who treat them as sex objects; they are consumed by their children (whom they have produced!) when they buy the role of the Supermother; they are consumed by authoritarian husbands who expect them to be submissive servants; and they are consumed by bosses who bring them in and out of the labor force and who extract a maximum of labor for a minimum of pay. They are consumed by medical researchers who try out new and unsafe contraceptives on them. They are consumed by men who buy their bodies on the street. They are consumed by church and state, who expect them to produce the next generation for the glory of god and country; they are consumed by political and social organizations that expect them to "volunteer" their time and energy. They have little sense of self , because their selfhood has been sold to others.

### **Women and the Spectacle**

It is difficult to consume people who put up a fight, who resist the cannibalizing of their bodies, their minds, their daily lives. A few people manage to resist, but most don't resist effectively, because they can't. It is hard to locate our tormentor, because it is so pervasive, so familiar. We have known it all our lives. It is our culture.

Situationists characterize our culture as a spectacle. The spectacle treats us all as passive spectators of what we are told are our lives. And the culture-as-spectacle covers everything: We are born into it, socialised by it, go to school in it, work and relax and relate to other people in it. Even when we rebel against it, the rebellion is often defined by the spectacle. Would anyone care to estimate the number of sensitive, alienated adolescent males who a generation ago modelled their behavior on James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause? I'm talking about a movie, whose capitalist producers and whose star made a great deal of money from this Spectacular.

Rebellious acts, then tend to be acts of opposition to the spectacle, but seldom are so different that they transcend the spectacle. Women have a set of behaviors that show dissatisfaction by being the opposite of what is expected. At the same time these acts are cliches of rebellion, and thus are almost prescribed safety valves that don't alter the theater of our lives. What is a rebellious woman supposed to do? We can all name the behaviors - they appear in every newspaper, on prime time television, on the best-seller list, in popular magazines - and, of course, in everyday life. In a setting that values perfectionist housekeeping, she can be a slob; in a subculture that values large families, she can refuse to have children. Other predictable insurrections? She can defy the sexual double standard for married women by having an affair (or several); she can drink; or use what is termed "locker room" language; or have a nervous breakdown; or - if she is an adolescent - she can "act out" (a revealing phrase!) by running away from home and having sex with a lot of men.

Any of these things may make an individual woman's life more tolerable (often, they make it less so); and all of them are guaranteed to make conservatives rant that society is crumbling. But these kinds of scripted insurrections haven't made it crumble yet, and, by themselves, they aren't likely to. Anything less than a direct attack upon all the conditions of our lives is not enough.

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**gals say no to nair!  
we like our armpit hair!  
If the goddess meant 4 our legs to B bare  
she wouldn'TA put hair down there!  
so gals say no to nair!  
gals say no to nair!**

**- Radical Cheerleaders, "No to Nair"**



perspective - do you have to be a particular variety of woman to be oppressed; you do not have to be part of the proletariat, either literally, as an industrial worker, or metaphorically, as someone who is not independently wealthy. You do not have to wait breathlessly for socialist feminist manifestoes to tell you that you qualify - as a housewife (reproducing the next generation of workers), as a clerical worker, as a student or a middle-level professional employed by the state (and therefore as part of the "new working class"). You do not have to be part of the Third World, or a lesbian, or elderly, or a welfare recipient. All of these women are objects in the commodity economy; all are passive viewers of the - spectacle. Obviously, women in some situations are far worse off than are others. But, at the same time, none are free in every area of their lives.

#### Women and the Commodity Economy

Women have a dual relationship to the commodity economy - they are both consumers and consumed. As housewives, they are consumers of household goods purchased with money not their own, because not "earned" by them. This may give them a certain amount of purchasing power, but very little power over any aspect of their lives. As young, single heterosexuals, women are purchasers of goods designed to make them bring a high price on the marriage market. As anything else - lesbians, or elderly single, or self-sufficient women with "careers", women's relationship to the marketplace as consumers is not so sharply defined. They are expected to buy (and the more affluent they are, the more they are expected to buy), but for some categories of women, buying is not defined primarily to fill out some aspect of a woman's role.

So what else is new? Isn't the idea of woman-as-passive-consumer, manipulated by the media, patronized by slick Madison Avenue men, an overdone movement cliche? Well, yes - and no. A Situationist analysis ties consumption of economic goods to consumption of ideological goods, and then tells us to create situations (guerrilla actions on many levels) that will break that pattern of socialised acceptance of the world as it is. No guilt-tripping; no criticizing women who have "bought" the consumer perspective. For they have indeed bought it: It has been sold to them as a way of survival from the earliest moments of life. Buy this: It will make you beautiful and lovable. Buy this: It will keep your family in good health. Feel depressed? Treat yourself to an afternoon at the beauty parlor or to a new dress.

Guilt leads to inaction. Only action, to re-invent the everyday and make it something else, will change social relations.

#### *The Gift*

Thinking she was the gift  
they began to package it early.  
they waxed its smile  
they lowered its eyes  
they tuned its ears to the telephone  
they curled its hair  
they straightened its teeth  
they taught it to bury its wishbone  
they poured honey down its throat  
they made it say yes yes and yes  
they sat on its thumbs  
That box has my name on it,  
said the man. It's for me.  
And they were not surprised.  
While they blew kisses and winked  
he took it home. He put it on a table  
where his friends could examine it

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**"When my reappointment as a lecturer was challenged because of my book [about lesbians], my more liberal colleagues defended me with the argument that writers of murder mysteries were not necessarily murderers; therefore it followed that the writer of a lesbian novel was not necessarily a lesbian".**



- Jane Rule, *Introduction to "Lesbian Images"* (1975)

saying dance saying faster.  
He plunged its tunnel  
he burned his name deeper.  
Later he put it on a platform under the Klieg lights  
saying push saying harder  
saying just what I wanted  
you've given me a son.

*Carole Oles[6]*

Women are not only consumers in the commodity economy; they are consumed as commodities. This is what Oles' poem is about, and it is what Tax has labelled "female schizophrenia". Tax constructs an inner monologue for the housewife-as-commodity: "I am nothing when I am by myself. In myself, I am nothing. I only know that I exist because I am needed by someone who is real, my husband, and by my children".[7]

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***There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days on anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it.***



**- Margaret Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" (1985)**

she can drink; or use what is termed "locker room" language; or have a nervous breakdown; or - if she is an adolescent - she can "act out" (a revealing phrase!) by running away from home and having sex with a lot of men.

Any of these things may make an individual woman's life more tolerable (often, they make it less so); and all of them are guaranteed to make conservatives rant that society is crumbling. But these kinds of scripted insurrections haven't made it crumble yet, and, by themselves, they aren't likely to. Anything less than a direct attack upon all the conditions of our lives is not enough.

When women talk about changing destructive sex role socialisation of females, they pick one of three possible solutions: (a) girls should be socialised more or less like boys to be independent, competitive, aggressive, and so forth. In short, it is a man's world, so a woman who wants to fit in has to be "one of the boys". (b) We should glorify the female role, and realise that what we have called weakness is really strength. We should be proud that we are maternal, nurturant, sensitive, emotional, and so on. (c) The only healthy person is an androgynous person: We must eradicate the artificial division of humanity into "masculine" and "feminine", and help both sexes become a mix of the best traits of each.

Within these three models, personal solutions to problems of sexist oppression cover a wide range: Stay single; live communally (with both men and women, or with women only). Don't have children; don't have male children; have any kind of children you want, but get parent and worker-controlled child care. Get a job; get a better job; push for affirmative action. Be an informed consumer; file a lawsuit; learn karate; take assertiveness training. Develop the lesbian within you. Develop your proletarian identity. All of these make sense in particular situations, for particular women. But all of them are partial solutions to much broader problems, and none of them necessarily require seeing the world in a qualitatively different way.

So, we move from the particular to more general solutions. Destroy capitalism. End patriarchy. Smash heterosexism. All are obviously essential tasks in the building of a new and truly human world. Marxists, other socialists, social anarchists, feminists - all would agree. But what the socialist, and even some feminists, leave out is this: We must smash all forms of domination. That's not just a slogan, and it is the hardest task of all. It means that we have to see through the spectacle, destroy the stage sets, know that there are other ways of doing things. It means that we have to do more than react in programmed rebellions - we must act. And our actions will be collectively taken, while each person acts autonomously. Does that seem contradictory? It isn't - but it will be very difficult to do. The individual cannot change anything very much; for that reason, we have to work together. But that work must be without leaders as we know them, and without delegating any control over what we do and what we want to build.

Can the socialists do that? Or the matriarchs? Or the spirituality-trippers? You know the answer to that. Work with them when it makes sense to do so, but give up nothing. Concede nothing to them, or to anyone else.

The past leads us if we force it to.

Otherwise it contains us  
in its asylum with no gates.  
We make history or it  
makes us.[8]

## Footnotes

[1]. Strasbourg Situationists, *Once the Universities Were Respected*, 1968, p.38.

[2]. Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political", *Notes from the Second Year*. N.Y.:

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**A true community consists of individuals — not mere species members, not couples — respecting each others individuality and privacy, at the same time interacting with each other mentally and emotionally — free spirits in free relation to each other — and co-operating with each other to achieve common ends. Traditionalists say the basic unit of "society" is the family; "hippies" say the tribe; no one says the individual.**

- Valerie Solanas, "The SCUM Manifesto" (1968)

[3]. Leighton, *op cit.*

[4]. Point-Blank!, "The Changing of the Guard", in *Point-Blank*, October 1972, p.16.

[5]. For one of the most illuminating of these early analyses, see Meredith Tax, "Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Everyday Life", Boston: Bread and Roses Publication, 1970.

[6]. Carole Oles, "The Gift", in *13th Moon*, II: 1, 1974, p. 39.

[7]. Tax, *op cit.*, p. 13.

[8]. Marge Piercy, excerpt from "Contribution to Our Museum", in *Living in the Open*. N.Y.: Knopf, 1976, pp.74-75.

### A Note On The Text

Carol Ehrlich's Socialism, Anarchism, and Feminism was first published as Research Group One Report 26 by Research Group One, 2743 Maryland Avenue, Baltimore, Md 21218, USA, in January '77, and ran to a second printing. An abridged version (which we reproduce) appeared as "Spectacular Times Number 7: Women and the Spectacle" in 1992.



## Let Patriarchy Burn!

A Feminist Rant

by (Uncredited) in *Do or Die Magazine*

"How many articles does it take until men start working on their shit? Aren't you tired of hearing and reading about it? Maybe Smith and Wesson do a better job? At least stop considering yourself revolutionaries. YOU ARE NOT MY COMRADE."

- Molly Tov in Profane Existence.

So I'm talking to an activist man about misogyny within a particular group and he's telling me i need to get in there and change it from the inside, not attack it from the outside. That sounds like reformism to me. He says no, because in our united fight against capitalism we're on the same side.

But we're not.

Patriarchy is often bandied about as a term to explain men's prejudices or/and behaviour toward women. But just as the behaviour and attitudes of a boss towards a worker is not the intrinsic problem of capitalism but rather an expression of it, so gender relations are some of the symptoms of the cultural, economic, social and ideological system of oppression, exploitation and power - Patriarchy.

An article about patriarchy (which was actually about sexism) on road protest camps appeared in *Do or Die* No. 7, and outlined some of the ways in which patriarchy shows itself. The list of 'complaints' was referred to as disgruntlement and claimed; "For all men's faults women are still very much respected on site and patriarchy does have its advantages." Patriarchy does have its advantages, but only for those who wish to maintain oppression. Any movement that does not challenge this oppression is not a fight for freedom. This article will examine how the ideology and practices of the radical ecology movement in the UK stunt the development of true resistance.

### Manifestations of Patriarchy In Earth First!

Patriarchy appears in a number of both obvious and subtle ways in advanced capitalist society. Unequal and unfair distribution of labour, rape and the constant threat of it, objectification of our bodies, women unheard, talked over, burdened with childcare and domestic slavery, depoliticised [their thoughts and actions made personal/emotional rather than political] and deprioritised. But instead of these being challenged in a radical movement like Earth First! they are replicated. As the article 'Patriarchy on Road Protest camps' suggests, gender relations on site range from the uncomfortable, through the intimidating to the ultimately impossible. The division of labour whereby men commit 'heroic' deeds and women do the washing

up is petty compared to the tolerated incidences of rape and sexual assault that occur on drunken nights. Aware activists talk angrily about the experiences of sex on site, not being utopian freedoms but a charming variety of sexual coercion of schoolgirls to total irresponsibility around contraceptives resulting in unwanted pregnancies. These power abuses are not women's specific resistance, separate from men's.



confined to sites but also to urban environments. One woman commented:

"When i first came to our anarchist social centre and thought it would be a good idea to get involved, it was this boy's club - there was this one woman who did shifts, but she just came in, cleaned up and served tea, it was the three blokes who'd sit around together, joke, and in this way sort out what's happening with it...it was a real effort on my side to feel responsible and become a part of the decision-making processes."

Not acknowledging women as autonomous political individuals (depoliticisation) seems a common experience in political movements. When talking of the struggle i have found most inspirational, i was dismissed as only being interested because my former male partner was also, as if my political thought process was centred in my cunt. The accusation of being smitten with a single person instead of dedicated to revolution was something many women i spoke to also had encountered.

The anecdotes of everyday sexisms are too numerous to list, but that they occur continuously and without paradox in the radical eco movement must be examined: these are not one-off, isolated incidents, but part of the patriarchal nature of Earth First! Without an understanding of - and resistance to - the multiple power relations in our society there can be no true social change.

### **Flawed Philosophies and Failing Philosophers**

The media construct of ecowarriors is not far enough removed from the realities to be ironic. One of the ideologies that is central to eco-activism is that of romanticism. Romanticism is a myth of patriarchy that creates opposites such as good/evil, man/woman, active/passive. This is a means of simplifying and justifying differences that are actually constructed. To be pushed into one of these definitions polarises us into restricted behaviour and restricted mindsets, limiting our beings and our potential. For example, the notion of 'defence of the planet' conveniently forgets the fact that we are fighting for ourselves. Instead the earth is the passive beauty, capitalism the evil dragon and we good fellows the noble knights.

### **Look at me mum, i've smashed the world**

Macho posturing can take many forms. From masking up in counter-productive situations, to throwing things without aim and mission, boasting about criminal records - or worse, criminal activities, or being the person down the tunnel the longest. These activities often operate at a level of competitiveness within the network rather than co-operation and suggest that activism is for the adrenaline and the recognition rather than the daily effort toward building mass resistance. Wanting to be seen to engage in heroic or hardcore activity relies on others' failure to do the same, and instead of these activities inspiring others to take action they alienate - hence the problem of some people ("activists") being asked to take action on behalf of other people; e.g.: people being asked to pie someone, or 'save' some land from road building. (Why does everyone need to take action when superman can do it for us?) Rather than using the most effective tactics available, macho activists need the most visual; hanging from harnesses is, in our 'movement', a more popular approach than mass direct action, and media stunts are seen as 'worthwhile' activity despite such an obviously problematic relationship with the media.

### **Crucifixion is too good for us**

The other side of the coin is the concept of activist suffering: - a few suffering for the needs of the masses. Accountable actions fall into this category, as do hunger strikes with unfeasible demands. As most people (in particular those with responsibilities such as children) are not willing to lose their liberty for actions of limited effectiveness. These actions remain the domain of a few who offer up themselves for 'the cause'. As before, these misguided actions mean that most people are excused from taking action (who needs to do anything when jesus will do it for us?) Those who suffer most in society do not fetishise or glamorise suffering. This privileged option of personal sacrifice courts attention sometimes termed 'public awareness' but like macho media stunts does little to forward radical social change.

Alongside an ideology of romantic eco-heroism comes a clear rejection of feminism (and other politics that draw attention to divisions between 'us'). This is of course essential to a polarised vision of the battle. We too are individually and collectively responsible for the shit that goes on, we too are the villains, the wrongdoers, and even 'the enemy'. - e.g. whilst struggling for the destruction of global capitalism we are still creaming off the Third World. Recognising our oppression we must also recognise our positions as oppressors, our privileges. This requires understanding the specific differences of our oppression: we are not equally abused by capitalism, this is dependent on our class, our race, our nationality, our sexuality, and our gender. The radical eco movement is only just beginning to address these issues and still fails to carry a concept of women's specific oppression or

## **AWOL@Sub-Plot: A slacktivist womens' reader**

Some oppressions are treated with more priority than others: the rape of women (a near universal experience) seems to be of less importance than the rape of the earth. Rape is seen as an individual and personal problem between rapist and victim rather than rooted in our patriarchal system. In the same way the destruction of the planet may be partly carried out by construction companies, but these companies are not the core problem. Again, fights for 'indigenous people's land rights' do not distinguish between men's and women's land rights which are (again, near universally) different. Most 'tribal' societies have indigenous laws which have different access and control of land according to gender.

Similarly, women's resistance is overlooked, made invisible, written out of history: from the diggers to the dockers, go directly past the suffragettes, do not collect any credit. Or perhaps worse, women's resistance is only understood as the co-opted part of the movement. Just as mainstream society looks upon Greenpeace as radical ecology, the co-opted liberal end of feminism is falsely viewed as feminism. But feminism is not about whether white middle-class western women can wear lipstick or not, it is about poverty and violence and power. The simplifications of the feminist movement, behaving as if all women were equally oppressed and all men were similarly oppressive, are lessons for the radical eco-movement. The feminist movement ate itself by not acknowledging difference - that some women were closer to power than others due to their class or race. This meant class and race struggles were not truly dealt with in the movement and that the mass feminist movement never became resistance for the benefit of most women but only for the privileged few.

An over-simplified vision of how to 'save' the world is not only wrong, it is dangerous. The radical eco-movement will suffer co-option if it is dominated by young white middle-class graduate men putting their concerns first: to be noticed, to be a hero, to set the agenda, to be special. For in the struggle for freedom the needs of the most dominant groups in society should come last. Women's resistance to patriarchy is not some sub-heading that can be dealt with 'after the revolution'. The global struggle against body mutilation, domestic violence, infanticide, sexual assault, rape, domestication, slavery, dehumanisation, poverty, forced sterilisation and forced reproduction is not nit picking.

### **Anarcho-misogynists Anonymous... A 12 step plan**

These are some ways of challenging our social conditioning by a patriarchal culture. Macho behaviour is not specific to men, although often more common as males have been traditionally encouraged into stereotypical men (meaning aggressive, dominating, active, individualistic etc.) and women encouraged into equally limited and repressive caricatures instead of us all achieving our full potential as human beings.

**Women's Space:** Women, spend time in it, especially if you don't understand why it exists. The experiences of women's space are different to mixed space. And let's stop 'discussing' it in mixed groups - women's space is neither requested or demanded, it is taken and the opinions of men are irrelevant.

**Skill Sharing:** It is largely a myth. Usually it is about one individual teaching one or many, and obviously gives rise to many problems of hierarchy and patronising behaviour. Lets work on real trading...you show me yours and i'll show you mine.

**New Women Being Fuck Fodder:** This is particularly present, or maybe just most visible, on mixed protest camps, although also a problem in women's camps when they are treated like lifestyle cruising grounds, at squat cafes/social centres and in urban groups. Other women can 'buddy up' with women who are new and let them know they are valued as activists. Males can be friendly but not invasive. Everyone can pull up their friends or intervene if somebody is being out of order. Be honest, tell newcomers about problems like this so they don't think they're imagining it, or that this is acceptable behaviour.

**Sexual Coercion:** While this is such a common complaint, it is often kept hush hush, people not wanting to rock the boat. As people who value direct action we need to take it - girl guerrilla groups who have issued confrontational warnings or revenge attacks on known bastards have claimed mixed areas as places not to mess with women in. The actions we take against corporate scum can and should also be taken against raping scum.

**Question Everything:** Why do you really want to do that banner drop? Is it the best, most effective attack on this particular target or is it the one that gets you the most credit? If you can't be bothered to go flyposting and engage in sabotage, but you will get nicked for something high profile and dangerous... ask yourself why. Think carefully before every action. Just what and who are you doing this for?

**Shut Up:** Meetings are generally dominated by a few mouthy individuals with little



particularly constructive, creative or original to say. Recognise that some people are more confident than others talking in meetings. Have go-rounds at the beginning and at the end of meetings and somewhere halfway too. When someone new or someone who doesn't usually speak gets the guts to say something, credit them. Properly facilitated meetings are a great asset to those who don't jump in. And talk to new people or quiet people afterward; tell them you liked what they said.

Wash Up: It's such a cliché it's almost a joke. But it takes more than soapsuds to sort out the division of labour. On actions do the things you don't usually, offer to do the support work, stay in the office, do leaflet distribution, be - godforbid - anonymous. If it's an action that's public then it doesn't need the trust of an affinity group off to burn something down. Team up with less experienced people - write that leaflet with someone who's never written one before instead of your usual comrade.

Sisterhood: To misquote one of my male friends - there's no point spelling womyn all funny if you don't do the acts too. Solidarity in sisterhood can be interpreted in 100's of ways, be doing at least some of them.

We Don't Need Another Hero: Putting ourselves and others in hero-positions fictionalises our activities rather than reaching out to others. Bragging is neither skill sharing nor empowering others to act. Let's get humble because nothing we do is glorious, especially not when it's sensational. The sexy factor of an action isn't the be all and end all and media coverage is generally counter-productive. Get real - seeing a young dreadlocked white boy hanging off a thin rope on the TV does not empower the viewer into thinking they can do the same.

Learn: Inform yourself of women's resistance, historically and geographically. If you know all about the Spanish revolution but not about 12th century women's rebellion in China widen your reading list.

Abandon Your Privilege: This is the hard one. First we need to acknowledge and recognise that as first world activists we occupy a global position of privilege. Most of us also have extra power due to our youth, our skin colour, our family class background. When we ignore our own or other's chains they don't just disappear, and when we topple these power relations most of us will get bruised on the way down. Admit we don't get the hardest deal. Listen to others, we might not know the best way. Get criticised, feel uncomfortable, and deal with it.

Unity Against Patriarchy: While the fight against patriarchy is women's struggle and it is imperative that 'feminist' men do not hijack this struggle, everyone should participate in overthrowing systems of oppression. "Not only because men are capable of its perpetration but because we can be accomplices as well, by engaging in harmful ridicule and by our silence. But the struggle for respect for the specificity of gender can also include us, by acknowledging what we are, what we are not, and above all, what we are capable of becoming." - Commandante Insurgente Marcos.

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*we got it goin' on,  
we say womyn are really strong  
we're not gonna go away  
cause pro-choice is here to stay  
womyn have the right to choose  
how would you feel if you were in our shoes?  
this all we're gonna say:  
respect our freedom or you will pay!*

*- Radical Cheerleaders, "Pro-Choice"*

## **Who is AWOL?**

AWOL are a firm fresh and funky breakdancing crew, straight from the all too urban heart of the beat. We dance to the extreme, and max our floor work. Do the robot with us if you wish to live.

*"Power to the sisters and therefore to the class" - Selma James*

We're a group of women who want a chance to discover freedom in our lifetimes. We want to explore the meanings of all those words that get bandied about: liberation, agency, solidarity, individual freedom, community, and autonomy. What's the point of surrendering yourself to be 'one of the crowd', 'one of the base' when that means losing your autonomy and control over your own politics.

What's the point in dropping out of society altogether when this option is clearly not a viable way to change society for everyone and doesn't actually challenge the status quo? Dropping out means losing lots of the gains that capitalist society has made (like the fridge, the internet and steel-alloy-bicycles), instead of demanding that these gains (more of them) be shared amongst everyone, not just the rich.

We believe in our deeply-held politics, and we believe in developing and practicing our politics. This is a difficult struggle. At the end, we might be different to how we were at the beginning, but it's a journey that we will undertake.

AWOL is for all women who will no longer put up with being "put in our place", be it at work, at home, by the media, in the bedroom, or indeed within "the movement" itself. AWOL is a handful of women who have begun to set up a collective over the past year. We aim to explore some of the ideas that we share in common, namely, a desire to uncover our autonomy, and exercise our hidden agency, in every sphere of our lives.



## **Contacting AWOL**

The best and most effective way to contact AWOL is if you have a massive search-light and if there is low cloud cover in the inner West of Sydney. Simply place a large black mask over the face of your searchlight (flame-proof please, safety first). The black mask **must** absolutely be in the shape of a rubber duckie.

Within fifteen minutes balaclava masked AWOL avengers will smash through your bedroom window (we don't use bourgeois doors). Our "Zapatista"® style pipes will stink up your bedroom with the feminist smell of tobacco victory.

We will flee from the scene of our all too recent carnage, with you in tow, to relocate in our hidden pirate island of seperatist women inspired by William Burroughs, but unwilling to compromise with the "rabbit men".

So abandon present social relations, and ~~b\*\*mb C\*tyR\*!l's~~  
~~entral St\*\*tion~~ today alongside tomorrow's future "Red Thatcher" brigade. The Great Leader is awaiting your signal!



Or you could go to <http://awol.blogspot.com> and leave a comment for us.

Or call Annette on 0402 562 048, or Meela on 0422 354 225, the options are limitless!